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The same cleansing power of fire is used by the Khevsur woman at the time of her purification when she leaves the menstrual hut (*samrevlo*) and returns home with her baby.

Many other peoples of the Caucasus share the Georgians' belief in the supernatural power of fire.[42] Thus, for example, the Abkhazians,[43] in order to protect women in childbed from the evil spirit, called *abn-ikou*, ask the help of the god of the house-hearth, called *ajakhar*, promising him a thank-offering for his help.

The people also believe in the protective power of a rope in the shape of a snake. For example, in the district of Sakatali, a rope resembling a snake is laid around the woman in childbed and the people continually fire their guns, because they believe that evil spirits are afraid of snakes and gun-shots.

In some parts of Georgia red thread is also used as a defense against the evil spirits attacking women in childbed. In such cases, the hip of the woman in travail is bound with red thread as a means of providing sympathetic magic which will protect her from evil spirits[44] who, as the people think, cause the suffering.

It should be interesting to mention briefly the belief of the Georgians, not only in the magical power of red thread, but in the red color generally. Almost every contagious disease is understood by the people to be sent not merely by evil spirits but as personifications of the spirits themselves.[45] Therefore, to cure the sick it is necessary, in their opinion, to please the spirits. The spirits are called *batonebi*, meaning "lords," the plural form of the Georgian word, *batoni*, meaning a lord. In order to appease and beseech the *batonebi*[46] to depart from sick persons, they try to please them with songs, music, prayers, decorating the room with gay colors, putting on a new dress, keeping everything clean, avoiding any disturbances, etc.

The principal color in decorating and dressing is red. This color predominates, and red thread is used as a protective

[42] Chursin: f.
[43] Derjavin: 14-15.
[44] Jashvili: 63.
[45] Stepanov: 88-9.
[46] Mamaladze: 45-6.

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755 measure. For example, if someone is ill with smallpox or measles, his neighbors stretch red thread around their fences and bind the waists of their children with red thread, because they believe it has the power to stop the disease. I remember seeing the children wearing such arm-bands for two weeks, when the child of one of our neighbors was ill with measles. And in the family of the sick an offering is brought to the *batonebi*. The offering consists of a hen, if the ill person is a girl, or a cockerel if it be a boy. The head, wings and legs of this fowl are painted red and the fowl is turned loose in the yard. Among the Georgians of Imerti,[47] when the sick person has recovered, the offered fowl is killed, cooked, and, together with cakes specially baked for the purpose, is taken into the nearby forest and put in such a place that "no human hand can reach them." The food and dishes are left in the woods and it is strictly forbidden to touch them. The Georgians of Megrelia also give similar offerings to the *batonebi*, as mentioned, with the difference that the fowl is permitted to live to senility, when it is killed and eaten by the family sacramentally.

789 944 In addition to the above-mentioned objects used as protection against evil spirits, the fish net is also regarded as a powerful medium.

The belief in the protective power of the fish net against the evil spirits attacking the mother in childbed and her babe was universal throughout Georgia in past times, and survives in different parts of the country today.

Interesting information concerning this matter is found in the work of Dr. J. Reineggs.[48] He relates that in order to protect the woman in childbed and her babe from the attack of evil spirits, the Georgians observe the custom of placing a sword or dagger beneath the pillow of the mother. And over the blanket of her bed is spread a red fish net, and at its sides lead bullets are fastened in order to keep the net in equilibrium on all sides and make it impossible for the evil spirits to penetrate the covers. In

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[47] Sagaradze: 13-14.
[48] Reineggs: 112-113.

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such an uncomfortable position the woman must remain for forty days before she will be permitted to breathe fresh air or leave the bed. "She exposes herself to every possible danger," adds the author, "if she at this time trims her hair or cuts her nails."

The belief in the magical power of the fish net is also expressed in special prayers[49] used for the healing of sick people of their afflictions, as, for example, in the prayers of the Georgians of Guria[50] to cure a cold, known by the name of *ujmuri*. "*Kirkali* is good," is said in the prayer. "Fish net by the head, the hackle-comb by the side," etc. The fish net is used also in the prayers recited at the time of childbirth by the Georgians of Meskheti.[51]

The pieces of such a net are kept sometimes in the house for this purpose. In the Museum of the Georgian Society of History and Ethnography, situated in Tiflis, is conserved a net specially made to cover the bed of a woman in childbirth. This net is made of red silk thread and is bestrewn with spangles. It was brought to the Museum from the upper part of Imerethi.[52]

Here, as in the case described by Dr. Reineggs, we have the net of red color which may be regarded as more powerful than the ordinary net, because to the magical power of the net is added the power of red thread and the color itself.

The Georgians of Imerethi,[53] to safeguard a woman with child, stretch a fish net from the ceiling over her bed, put a dagger under her pillow, and an axe on the threshold of the room. The evil spirit, they think, may be frightened by the axe and will not dare to enter the woman's room; but in case this obstacle fails to stop him, he surely will be scared of the net, in which he may be ensnared, and upon the dagger, as upon the axe, he may cut himself. With all these precautions taken, the evil spirits will by no means disturb the mother and the babe.

The same custom was formerly observed also by the Georgians of Megrelia. In the seventeenth century, at the time of the

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[49] Chursin: 0, 222.
[50] Mamaladze: 103-4.
[51] Khakhanov: b, 11.
[52] Chursin: *Ibid.*
[53] Mashurko: 306.

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residence in Megrelia of the Italian missionary, Archangelo Lamberti, this custom was in common use in the country. "As the most important means against the evil spirits," writes Lamberti,[54] "they (the Megrelians) regard the fish net with which they cover the beds of the sick and the cradles of the children. With this net they think to cleanse the air of witchcraft and the 'evil eye,' which, as they believe, is dangerous to the sick person. Besides, in order to frighten the devil, they put under the pillow of the sick person an unsheathed sword and also a spear or some other weapon."

In order to protect the woman in childbed, the Georgians of Meskhethi[55] nail a horse shoe or iron chain on the threshold of the room, because they believe that the evil spirit (*avi suli*) will not dare to step over them and enter the room. The mother and the baby are covered with the net, and at the mother's head they put a dagger and a spit with three onions upon it, as they believe that the odor of the onions is disgusting to the *avi suli*. The dagger and the spit, as iron things, are regarded by them as the best means of repulsing the evil spirits. But to make safety certain, besides the above measures, it is necessary also, they think, to say a special prayer for the occasion which must be repeated by the woman with child.

Among the Georgians of Guria,[56] the woman expecting a child is called in Guria *melogine*, meaning "the laying in bed," from the Georgian word, *logini* (bed).[57] After the birth of the child as soon as the woman is put to bed, the dagger is placed under her pillow, the iron hackle-comb is put under her bed, and upon the bed is hung the fish net. This is done with the aim of keeping away the evil spirits from the mother and babe, whom it likes to attack. The net, dagger and comb are used in this case as the objects of which, according to the people's opinion, the evil spirit is afraid.

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[54] Lamberti: 168.
[55] Khakhanov: b, 10.
[56] Jorbenadze: 246.
[57] Mamaladze: 92.